A Short Sociology of Archetypes

Mike Sosteric

mikes@athabascau.ca

[Download PDF](#) for active links

https://www.academia.edu/44254363/

Abstract

Archetypes are collective images of spiritual/psychic/instinctual power. Archetypes inform our self-image, influence how we see the world, and direct many of the actions we take as we navigate and create our realities. According to psychologist Carl G. Jung, archetypes are powerful determiners of human experience and human psychological and political realities. As such, they hold significant spiritual, psychological, and sociological interest. While there has been sustained interest in the psychology and spirituality of archetypes, to date sociologists have studied the archetypes only tangentially. Hoping to overcome this lacuna, this paper explores the sociology of archetypes by examining the emotional and psychological power of archetypes and by demonstrating how powerful archetypes become situated in elite master narratives/"spiritual" discourses are designed not in the service of human health and development, but in the service of the political and economic agenda of societal and world elites.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.....Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. (Marx 1978:172).

...in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse….We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault 1980:93)

It is therefore possible to contribute to political action not only by entering the fray but also by providing studies of official techniques of regulation, punishment, normalisation and so on to those groups which have a direct interest in their subversion" (McHoul and Grace 1993:19)

Introduction

Archetypes, as collective images representing deep psychological and spiritual forces, have long been central to understanding human thought, behaviour, and cultural production. Articulated in detail by Carl G. Jung (Jung 1980), archetypes are viewed as symbolic representations of universal ideas that emerge from the human psyche. According to pundits, these symbols not only answer fundamental questions about identity and purpose but also underpin narratives that guide individual and collective experiences. While much has been written about archetypes in psychology and spirituality, their sociological dimensions remain under-explored.

This paper seeks to fill that gap by focusing in detail on archetypes as sociological phenomena. It situates archetypes within the broader framework of human narratives, distinguishing between mundane narratives that address everyday experiences and existential narratives that engage with profound questions of meaning, purpose, and reality. Importantly, the paper highlights how archetypes—through their integration into religious, political, and cultural systems—can serve as tools of ideological control. It argues that archetypes are not neutral; they are shaped, elaborated, and disseminated in ways that reflect the interests of specific social groups, particularly elites.

By tracing the historical and cultural trajectory of archetypes, from Zoroastrian religious texts to modern media like Hollywood films, the paper demonstrates how these symbolic constructs are manipulated to maintain systems of power. At the same time, it explores the potential for

archetypes to be reimagined and reclaimed for more egalitarian and transformative purposes. This dual perspective—analyzing both the co-optation of archetypes and their potential for liberation—underscores their practical significance in shaping both individual identities and collective social structures.

Through this sociological lens, this paper invites readers to critically engage with the production and dissemination of archetypes, recognizing their influence on both personal development and societal dynamics. It also calls for a rethinking of archetypes, advocating for their reconstruction in ways that align with progressive, humanistic, and ecological values. This exploration is not only an academic exercise but also a practical endeavour to understand and reshape the symbolic frameworks that define our shared reality.

Stories and Narratives

Humans are a species of storytellers. There is no denying that. Storytelling, which I'll define simply as communication through creative narration, is a human universal (Brown 1991). The ability to tell stories emerges spontaneously in childhood and continues throughout one's entire life (Smith et al. 2017). Stor telling is generally considered *functional* for humanity, evolving as way to facilitate human adaptation by providing mechanisms for internal communication (Biesele 1986) that is, mechanisms to convey information and expectations on social behaviours, norms and values and taboos, mechanisms for healing rifts and encouraging understanding (Wiessner 2014), and mechanisms for enhancing co-operation and community.

Stories themselves don't just appear out of thin air, or are they usually novel and original. Stories are usually cut from larger **Narrative**. According to Halverson, a narrative is a "coherent system of interrelated...stories" that share a conflict trajectory and rhetorical form (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011:14). Stories are cut from an existing narrative cloth. Consider the Harry Potter story. That story is cut from what we might call the "Jesus Narrative." Harry Potter is a Jesus, a "chosen one" destined to eradicate the world of a personified Voldemort/Darth Vadar/Satan-type character. He has his apostles who help him, he's sacrificed, resurrected, and then battles it out with the dark forces in what we are told is an inevitable and triumphant victory for the forces of light. It doesn't matter your cultural background, whether you are Islamic, Catholic, Baha'i, Hindu, faithful, or atheist you will recognize this narrative.

Narratives themselves are built up from archetypes. Archetypes are ideas (like the idea that we exist in a universe where good is pitted against evil) that provide the characters and plot points used to build a narrative. We'll get to defining archetypes in a bit. Before that though, for the purposes of analysis, we can break narratives down into two categories, mundane narratives and existential narratives. A Mundane Narrative[1] is a narrative with mundane themes. Mundane narratives deal with everyday life and common experiences, like love, friendship, conflict, or personal growth. A classic example here is the movie *The Breakfast Club.* On the other hand, we have Existential Narratives[2] Existential narratives deal with existential issues. They purport to answer the Big Questions, like "What is the meaning of life?", "What is the nature of reality?", "Why am I here?", "What is my purpose?" or "Why do bad things happen in the world?" The Bible and other "sacred" literature are examples of existential narratives, as are Hollywood movies like *The Matrix,* which is a movie that explores issues of reality, perception, and purpose, or *Star Wars,* which offers, like the Catholic Church offers, a universe grounded in the interplay of light and dark, good and evil.

Mundane or existential narratives, like the stories that are cut from them, are functional, and for many of the same reasons—they convey information, they help us communicate, they socialize, they heal, and sometimes they do the opposite. We might call narratives that have some function,

---

1   https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Mundane_Narrative
2   https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Existential_Narrative

Functional Narratives. Functional narratives[3] are narratives that perform useful functions, like conveying information, reinforcing norms and values, healing social rifts, etc.

Narratives, particularly existential ones, are ubiquitous. Existential narratives are embedded in cultural artifacts like religious texts, statues, or stained glass windows, philosophical treatises, myths, and even modern media, demonstrating their pervasive role in defining human experience across historical and societal contexts. They are also hidden behind closed doors. As we shall see "secret" organizations, esoteric organizations like Freemasonary, often take it upon themselves to not only distribute and perform, but also recreate these narrative forms (Sosteric 2014).

In addition to being ubiquitous narratives, particularly existential ones, are also profoundly powerful, and this for a couple of reason reasons. For one, narratives are powerful because they provide answers to life's biggest big questions, thereby functioning as frameworks through which individuals and societies interpret their realities, assign meaning to their experiences, navigate their existence, and act in the world. These narratives operate as cognitive and emotional scaffolding for human thought and behaviour. They shape how people perceive themselves and others, dictate moral and ethical considerations, and influence actions in both private and public spheres. In other words, they offer inspiration, guidance, and direction on how to live.

---

3   https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Functional_Narrative

Narratives that shape thought and action are powerful on their own. However, it's not just stories told around a fire. A second reason that narratives are powerful is because of the dramaturgical sophistication with which they are often presented. You can hear the Jesus story a thousand times and never get bored of it if the production values and writing are quality enough. People will watch that narrative dozens, sometimes hundred of times, if it is glitzed up with special effects and wrapped in powerful music Just think Star Wars whose lone single figure, a white man, rises from working-class roots to save an entire civilization; or Harry Potter, a "chosen one (and white guy) who engages and banishes evil; or, the Matrix, computer-geek white guy; or Lord of the Rings, a short white guy with hairy feet. The list is endless. It is hard to imagine a better strategy for indoctrination than to create ideological products that people will willingly consume.

We like to think that the existential narratives of this planet offer deep spiritual truths because we like to think, as we have been told, by old men mostly (Jung 1980) that the archetypes which constitute ancient, primordial aspects of our terrestrial and cosmic existence, but they don't; at least not in their current form. Even a cursory examination shows that familiar existential narratives are rooted in social class hegemony. That is, groups with special interests fiddle with and modify narratives and archetypes to suit their own material needs. Samuel Perry offers a gentle statement when he suggests that narratives and archetypes are manipulated, contested, and altered to coincide with the special interests of what he calls "interpretative communities" (Perry 2020). Ehrman (2007) offers a similarly gentle view when he points out that representatives of

the early Catholic Church entered thousands of edits into the original bible, many of which it would be safe to assume supported the elite and patriarchal prerogatives of the Medieval Catholic church. But these gentle statements really don't capture the profound extent to which certain groups, particularly the accumulating classes of various nations and epochs, have interfered with the narratives of this planet. When you crack the lid and peer inside, as we will as move forward, their influence is revealed as profound and consequently quite shocking.

I have examined the profound influence of the accumulating class on the existential narratives of this planet elsewhere (Sosteric 2014, 2020, 2024), pointing out how they have captured and colonized these narratives to suit their own economic, colonial, and military needs (Sosteric 2018). We will cover these readings as we progress through this curriculum. In this paper, I want to dive a bitter deeper into the narratives themselves, specifically looking at the core element of these narratives, the archetype, which as Ellens (2001) points out provides the foundational symbolic grammar upon which powerful and often destructive (Ellens 2001) existential narratives are built.

What are archetypes?

So, as we have said, archetypes are the characters and plot sentences used to construct the narrative cloth from which we cut our various songs and stories. But what are archetypes, exactly? According to Carl Jung, an archetype is a collectively shared symbolic representation of

some idea or concept that originates from the repetitive, shared experiences of our distant ancestors and primordial past (Jung 1964, 1980). Sounds fancy, but it is wrong. While it is true that archetypes are collectively shared representations, I would define archetypes with a bit less superstitious and a bit more focus simply as ideas that provide answers to big questions, like "Who am I?", "Why am I here?", and "What is my purpose?"

Consider, for example, the idea that we live in a universe characterized by a battle between good and evil. This idea, which everybody believes in some form it seems, is an archetype because it answers at least three big questions for people, "Why am I here?" "What is my purpose?" and "Why do bad things happen to people?" The answer the good versus evil archetype provides is that bad things in the world happen because of evil, either internalized as a part of flaws in our collective identity, or personified as an external force. Your purpose for existence, your reason for being here, is to choose good so you can fight against, and ultimately destroy, all that is evil. If you ask the question, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here" and I answer that you are here to grow and develop and learn and triumph over your animal nature or the forces of evil, you've answered with an archetype. Archetypes answer big questions.

Another example of an archetype is the Hero's Archetype (Campbell 2004) which helps build a narrative called the Hero's Journe, or Fool's Narrative, as I call it. The idea of the Fool's

narrative is simply that we are here to engage a "dangerous journey of the soul," a lifetime (even multi-lifetime) journey of self-discovery, enlightenment, testing, struggle, evolution, an often cataclysmic, but triumphal, scene, and final perfection (Campbell 2004). According to this narrative, we are the Star in a cosmic show, a hero, potentially, but one in need of tutelage, tempering, and/or karmic redemption. This journey is an ascent towards some distant pinnacle of superiority and perfection. Along the way, we'll have to pass various tests and challenges. A successful hero's journey leads to salvation, self-realization, individuation, or some other social, psychological, or economic reward. An unsuccessful journey leads to psychological collapse (a shattered mirror), or some other negative outcome. In secular, scientific terms, we are evolving individuals, here to complete an evolutionary ascent towards some sort of evolutionary, but probably unattainable, perfection.

Like the good versus evil archetype, this archetype is present everywhere. You find this idea in Western theology (you are ejected from the Garden and you have to win your way back in), Eastern theology (in order to reach Nirvana you have to learn lessons and clear any karmic debt you accumulate), and science where you are considered an evolving ape moving towards higher levels of capacity and consciousness. You also find it peppered in the art and cultures of this world. You find it in movies, music, television, literature, news, and so on. Two iconic examples here are the "Binary Sunset Scene" from Star Wars Episode IV a New Hope, and the "Hero's Shot" from the Truman (is that "True man") Show. (see clips).

This Hero's Journey, this Fool's Narrative is even configured into the Western Tarot by the Fool card, which shows an individual "hero" (here literally depicted as a "fool') about to step off a mountain to undertake a herculean journey towards perfection. To tell the full story, this fool is jumping into a body (a "chariot", another tarot card) and his body is going to carry him through a lifetime of divine or evolutionary lessons where he will, if he is lucky, pass judgment (another tarot archetype), enter into heaven, graduate onto the next universal level, and so on and so forth. He is a "fool in school," according to this pervasive archetype, and so are you. Tarot "connoisseur" Brigit Biddy perfectly captures the narrative.

> In the Fool Tarot card, a young man stands on the edge of a cliff, without a care in the world, as he sets out on a new adventure. He is gazing upwards toward the sky (and the Universe) and is seemingly unaware that he is about to skip off a precipice into the unknown. Over his shoulder rests a modest knapsack containing everything he needs – which isn't much (let's say he's a minimalist). The white rose in his left hand represents his purity and innocence. And at his feet is a small white dog, representing loyalty and protection, that encourages him to charge forward and l*earn*

THE FOOL .

the lessons he came to learn. The mountains behind the Fool symbolise the challenges yet to come. They are forever present, but the Fool doesn't care about them right now; he's more focused on starting his expedition.(Brigit 2020: italics added)

Why Study Archetypes?

As answers to big questions, as collective symbolic representations of existential ideas and concepts, **archetypes are interesting to psychologists and others for at least three reasons. The first reason,** as Jung, Campbell, and others have observed, many archetypes appear in roughly the same form in the experiences of adults and children all over the world. They are, he argues, universal features of human experience that remain identifiable despite their variable historical or cultural context. For scholars interested in humans or some aspect of their existence, like psychologists, sociologists, neurologists, historians, etc., this is undeniably interesting.

The second reason that archetypes are interesting is because their experience, especially during powerful mystical experiences, is often attended by psychological and emotional healing, even transformation (Miller 2004; Vaillant 2002). Archetypes are not merely random outbursts of an over-imaginative psyche; they can sometimes bear considerable psychological and emotional weight. Jung picked up on this. According to Jung, archetypes function to facilitate individuation (i.e. mental and emotional maturation) and healing. Carl Jung said archetypes help us understand

things we cannot understand, deal with realities (like death) that we would rather not deal with, and add meaning to an otherwise meaningless existence. Archetypes provide "mental therapy for the sufferings of anxieties of [humankind] in general [like] hunger, war, disease, old age, death." (Jung 1980:11). This Jungian perspective on archetypes has triggered a significant psychological literature on using archetypes found in various "sacred" sources for psychological and spiritual development (Jayanti 1988; Metzner 1971; Semetsky 2000).

The third reason archetypes are interesting is because, as Jung recognized, archetypes are powerful, so powerful in fact that he claimed, and I agree, that **archetypes shape reality.** Jung did not mince words here. He said archetypes underlie and "create myths, religion, and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history." (Jung 1964:76). We can see the power and influence that archetypes have if we consider the good versus evil archetype. This archetype, answers the question "Why am I here?" and "What should I do?" by postulating a cosmic/evolutionary struggle between forces of good and evil, is adopted by atheists, agnostics, and devotees the world over. These forces may be personified into powerful cosmic forces, like Satan or Darth Vader, or they may be secularized as powerful and unconscious psychological or instinctual structures (Regardie 2004), like Jung's Shadow and Animus or Freud's selfish little id. Many individuals adopt some version of this archetype and when they do, it exerts a powerful influence over their lives. It influences how they see the world, how they seem themselves, and how they act in the world. Those who adopt this

archetype inevitably see themselves to one degree or another as actors on the side of good in some cosmic struggle against evil. They also inevitably see the operation of these forces in the world. Nazi Germany? School shootings? Taliban oppression? American Imperialism? Monsanto greed? The fall of New York's Twin Towers? When we adopt the good versus evil archetype, we see in these events the operation of evil. Finally, those who adopt the good versus evil archetype act a certain way towards others. Those we think of as "evil" get rejection, disdain, and even physical violence. Those who are deemed as good get to be included and supported within the community.

Note, the Fool's narrative is also very powerful. We will examine that in more detail when we take a look at the film "The Truman Show" in our next reading, and also when we introduce the Triumph of Spirit Archetype System later in this course.

Why are Archetypes so Powerful

To review, archetypes are interesting. They answer big questions and they have significant psychological, sociological, and political import. If you accept all this, and in particular if you accept that archetypes are powerful, then the next question is **what gives archetypes their power**? Despite what folks like Jung and Campbell have to say, it is not because of their mystical, phylogenic origin or magical power. **Archetypes are powerful for two reasons,** for a) what they are and b) because of how they are presented.

As for what they are, archetypes are **answers to big questions.** Answers to big questions are powerful because, as Maslow (1943), and others, observed close to a century ago humans have a hard-wired need to know and understand the world—a hard-wired need for truth and understanding. Given this powerful need to know, any concept or idea that purports to answer a big question is automatically attractive. I would speculate that humans are primed to believe these answers, or at least to give them weighty consideration.

As for how they are presented, archetypes (answers to big questions) are often presented as if they are special, no matter if they are true or not. Their natural resonance with human consciousness (see number one above) is deliberately amplified in a presentation process that sociologist Clifford Geertz calls sacrilization (Geertz 2004). As noted, [sacrilization](#) is the process by which certain objects, symbols, or actions are invested with sacred or religious significance within a cultural or social context. Sacrilization involves elevating things beyond their everyday or utilitarian functions to imbue them with deeper meaning and spiritual importance. Some examples should make this clear.

When a priest lifts a fancy gold cross in a beautiful Gothic church with a choir singing beautiful music and an elaborate altar as a backdrop, literally elevating that cross above the people below, that priest is deliberately, and probably consciously, sacrilizing the cross.

When an ethnocentric psychologist writes a book on archetypes with long-winded arguments and pretty pictures, telling us how important they are and using words like "ancient" and "primordial," they are sacrilizing the archetypes they describe.

When a Hollywood director hires John Williams or Hans Zimmer to score a film, and that composer uses French horns to write a triumphal melody, and then that melody is attached to the actor playing "the hero," they are sacrilizing that hero archetype.

This is why archetypes (answers to big questions) are powerful. They satisfy the human need to know and understand, thereby resonating with human consciousness, and their resonance is deliberately amplified.

Where do archetypes come from?

Arguably, archetypes are significant and important, powerful, and worthy of detailed study. The question at this point becomes, where do archetypes come from? First and foremost, archetypes come, and we should never forget this, from the *imagination*. For an archetype to exist, it must be imagined in some way. There are different ways people imagine archetypes. Sometimes archetypes are imagined in gentle meditative states. Sometimes they are imagined in dreams with deep meaning. Sometimes they occur in powerful "mystical" visions. Sometimes they are made up in a writer's meeting, or by committee. Note that this imagining of archetypes is not uncommon. Everybody has archetypal experiences at one point or another in their life. We find

archetypal elements in the dreams of children (Jung 1964), in the *Dreamtime* of Australian aborigines (Lawlor 1991; Mudrooroo 1995), in the dream quests, vision quests and power quests of Indigenous North Americans (Broker 1983; Frederick Johnson 1943; Harner 2013), in the mystical experiences of Christian mystics (Jantzen 1995; Julian of Norwich 1901), and in the output of artists like Michelangelo or Pink Floyd (for example their The Wall album has overtones of the Hero's Journey).

It is accurate to suggest that archetypes are sourced in human imagination and underlined by special experiences, but this does not get to their root. The question remains, where does human imagination come from? There are two possible answers to this question. The first answer is that imagination (and the archetypes which flow from it) are rooted in the neurological and biological systems of the body. In this materialist view, it is the neurons in your brain that form the substrate from which emerge the images, words, and music that form our archetypal representations. Along these lines, Carl Jung suggested archetypes were "archaic remnants" or "primordial images of our primordial human experiences, present in an "immensely old psyche" that still forms the basis of our modern mind (Jung 1964). He suggested these primordial ideas are expression of our "instincts" and "physiological urges" that "manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images" (Jung 1964). They are "the unconscious image of the instincts themselves, in other words...they are *patterns of instinctual behaviour." (Jung 1980:44: italics in original)*. According to Jung, archetypes represent the way

our primitive, but curiously more powerful, unconscious mind "thinks;" as Jung says archetypes, as representations of a powerful symbolic unconsciousness, "paves the way for solutions" (Jung 1980:33) to issues, fear, problems, etc. More recently, but in the same vein of thought, evolutionary psychologists and neurologists have suggested that archetypes are "core representations of social instincts" (Vaughn and Neuberg 2019) that arise as a consequences of the challenges our ancient ancestors faced. As Becker and Neuberg note (2019:61), "Archetypes arise from complex adaptive systems that have been selected to solve social and biological problems."

Jung and others go through quite a few contortions to get to a point where it might be reasonable to claim that the collective, creative, meaningful, and powerful archetypes that emerge are merely adaptive components of the body's neurological systems. However, if one is prepared to put aside materialist presumptions it is possible to suggest an alternative, that archetypes are conceptual/symbolic communications from a Consciousness that exists independent of the individual human mind and body, from a non-local mind as Dossey (2015) calls is, or a Fabric of Consciousness,[4] as I do. Connection to this independent consciousness is variable and not a given. Most of the time we are closed to communication with this Fabric; however, during the periods of receptivity and *connection* that occur in dreams, during quiet meditative practice, and in powerful and visionary experiences, the contents of this Fabric filter (sometimes slam) their way through. When they do, they are interpreted as special/sacred ideas/archetypes by the people

4   https://spiritwiki.lightningpath.org/index.php/Fabric_of_Consciousness

who experience them, and subsequently elaborated by elites who, as we saw in our last lesson on the article "A Sociology of Tarot", corrupt and use them to control.

The question of the ultimate source of archetypes, whether these originate in bodily systems or are transmitted and received from some larger independent source, is important, but beyond our scope here. For our purposes, it is enough to understand that the human imagination is the proximate source of archetypes. It is when a human imagines something in a dream, a vision, or whatever, and it is when these dreams and images contain collectively significant psychological, emotional, or intellectual messaging, that we see the manifestation of an archetype.

Symbol Factories

Typically, the psychological/neurological story about archetypes ends with the assertion that the archetypes are biologically rooted adaptive messages of some sort. The psychological task then becomes to show how these adaptions link to psychological, sociological, or evolutionary pressures and experiences, and how these things function in the human mind. From a sociological perspective, however, it is important to understand archetypes are not just individual productions. When a child, an adult, a mystic, a dying person, or whatever, has a vision, and when that vision contains a powerful archetype, that person is rarely the only one involved in that vision. As noted, archetypes, when they emerge in individual consciousness, are experienced

as significant and special. This special "feel" motivates those who experience them to *express* them, and they usually do.

Sometimes, archetypes are expressed directly by the individuals who have them, as for example when a young child recounts a dream of ascension to a father, or when an artist or musician creates a piece of artwork with archetypal themes. We might call this type of expression **Primary Expression** because it is the individual who experienced the archetype that is interpreting and telling its story. Sometimes, however, other people get involved and "help" the person express, interpret, and tell the story. For example, the child who has an archetypal dream might tell their father who then tells a psychologist about the dream. The psychologist might then write an interpretation that, if published in a book, can reach many people over many generations. Or, a mystic might have an archetypal vision, or a series of archetypal visions. This mystic might talk about the archetypes, but then somebody else might come along and set down the visions in a book, Veda, Gatha, Bible, or scripture of some sort. We might call this type of expression **Secondary Expression** because the expression is taken over by an individual or institution without direct experience of the archetype.

Note that expressing an archetype is not the only thing we do to communicate it. We also interpret archetypes, to ourselves and to others. Carl Jung refers to the interpretation of archetypes, whether that is done in a primary or secondary fashion, as an **elaboration**. As with expression, elaboration can be **Primary Elaboration** (when the individual themselves elaborate)

or **Secondary Elaboration** (when another person or persons get involved). Elaboration is important, sociologically speaking, because elaboration is the site where outside influence and corruption can be easily discerned. See for example the article "A Sociology of Tarot."

Although he is aware that elaboration can lead to something "entirely different" from the original experience (Jung 1980:9), it is a perfunctory awareness. There is no analysis of the processes or people which impinge on the expression of archetypes and turn them into something "entirely different." In the end, Jung simply accepts that if archetypes are elaborated, they are elaborated for positive purposes. This is the case even when, perhaps even especially when in his eyes, large-scale elite institutions like the Christian Church are involved. Jung says archetypes, especially when elaborated in Church dogma, help one mitigate powerful experiences of divinity that would otherwise overwhelm. He seems to base this on the fact that his religion helped him escape from being overwhelmed by his archetypal mystical experiences. "...the dogmatic image of divinity that had been developed over the centuries worked like a healing draught. It helped him to assimilate the fatal incursion of an archetypal image and so escape being torn asunder." (Jung 1980:11)

Jung's positive assessment of elaboration is sociologically naive. Humans are imperfect, self-interested, organized into social classes, and often damaged by a toxic socialization process that undermines their intelligence and ability to understand. As a consequence, bias and other factors

enter into the elaboration, not only in the primary but also (and perhaps especially) in the secondary expression and elaboration.

Finally, the Sociology

We can see this process of primary and secondary elaboration in the history of the Zoroastrian religion, a faith created from the mystical experiences of Zarathustra (a.k.a. Zoroaster). Zoroaster was a mystic who lived approximately 1,000 B.C.E. (Boyce 2001). Zoroaster had a series of visions the output of which became the Zoroastrian religious faith. Interestingly, As we shall see in our reading on Zoroastrianism (Sosteric 2024), Zoroaster appears to have imagined many of the archetypes that we are familiar with today, like the struggle between light and dark forces, and the ideas of testing, punishment, judgment, reward, and so on. As Boyce (2001:1) notes, "Zoroastrianism is the oldest of the revealed creedal religions, and it has probably had more influence on mankind, directly and indirectly, than any other single faith" (Boyce, 2001: 1).

Zoroaster's visions were considered sacred revelations, and his grass-roots, anti-elite teachings (Messadie 1996) were passed on word of mouth for several centuries until finally, in and around C.E. 250, the Zoroastrian teachings and the archetypes which they contained were "elaborated" and written down into the Gathas, the sacred books of the Zoroastrian Faith. This elaboration and codification was conducted by a Sassanian high priest named Tanser, working under the authority of the Sassanian autocrat Ardashir. Tanser began the process of elaboration and

codification when he declared Ardashir the final arbiter of the Zoroastrian doctrine. Tanser claimed this authority for his regent by suggesting that Ardashir was "more richly endowed with virtues than the ancients...." Tanser further suggested that Ardashir was uniquely qualified to revive a faith that had "decayed" because he was a man of "true and upright judgment..." (Boyce 2001:102–3). Once the authority of Ardashir had been proclaimed, Tanser then selected a single Zoroastrian tradition among several that were available in the region, after which he brutally and with "excessive bloodshed" (Boyce 2001:103) sterilized the archetypal field by suppressing all other traditions.

> "...in place of the former fraternity of regional communities, a single Zoroastrian church was created under the direct and authoritarian control of Persia; and together with this went the establishment of a single canon of Avestan text, approved and authorized by Tanser... Tanser set about his business and selected one tradition and left the rest out of the canon. And he issued this decree: The interpretation of all the teachings of the Mazda-worshipping religion is our responsibility." (Boyce 2001:103)

Why would the autocrat Ardashir claim interpretive superiority, reduce the Zoroastrian faith to a single cannon, and violently subdue competing understandings? The answer to these questions is simple. The grammar of Zoroastrian religious teachings were archetypes and archetypes are powerful. Ardashir used the Zoroastrian religion and the archetypes they contained as

propaganda. He used them to consolidate power and gain domination over his enemies. He used them not for the good of humanity and not because he thought they reflected some neurological or spiritual truths, but to construct a discourse (McHoul and Grace 1993) that would help him create a world in his image by controlling how people saw themselves, saw the world, and how they acted in the world. According to Mary Boyce,

> Ardashir was not only a military genius, but a man of great shrewdness and administrative talents, who was prepared to use bloodless means as well as warlike ones to establish his rule and create a new Persian empire; and one of the tools which he chose for this was religious propaganda. There can be little doubt that the priests of Persia, whose forefathers had led to Zoroastrian community under the Achaemenians, felt themselves well fitted to do so again; and they plainly undertook with zeal the task of persuading their fellow Iranians that they, together with the new dynasty to which they lent their support, were more devout and orthodox, and would be truer upholders of the faith, than their Parthian predecessors had been. (Boyce 2001:101–2)

Ardashir and his high priest Tanser created what Ruyle referred to as an Ideological Institution. According to Ruyle (1975:11), ideological institutions are "special instruments of... thought control that are staffed and/or controlled by those who benefit from and therefore seek to, consciously and with considerable vigour, maintain systems that provide them with "special

privileges and wealth." Walt Disney, Marvel Studios, and the Catholic Church are all ideological institutions.

We'll talk more about ideological institutions and another important institution, symbol factories, a bit later in this course. For now, consider that the example of Ardashir and the Zoroastrian demonstrates, like the example of the Tarot (Sosteric 2014), exactly how elites create these "special instruments," as well as just how much vigour they use to create and maintain the system.

At this time, there are several open questions concerning how Ardashir used the Zoroastrian archetypes to create his new Persian empire. What elements of the Zoroastrian archetypes did he suppress when he consolidated the teachings? What elements of the Zoroastrian did he reinterpret? Did his reinterpretation of the archetypes provided by Zoroaster significantly alter them, perhaps even change their meaning? Who were these efforts aimed at? Were they aimed at other elites or the masses in general? Were his efforts successful? Did taking control and modifying an entire religion help him create the world that he envisioned?

Whatever the answer to these interesting questions is, it does not change the basic argument which is simply this: if we want to understand archetypes, we cannot simply look at the archetypes themselves, we also have to look at the people expressing the archetypes, their social class and gender positions, their economic interests, their biases, and so on. In other words, we

have to look at motivation and purpose of specific interpretive communities, because that figures into the archetypes we receive and how we interpret them. Given Ardashir's goal of regional domination and his willingness to use archetypes and human spirituality as a tool in his ideological and physical conquest of the region, it is unlikely the archetypes we all receive through the Zoroastrian Gathas, and which now penetrate Judaism, Islam, and even atheist popular culture (Sosteric 2024), represent the archetypes as originally imagined by Zoroaster himself.

Contested Spirituality

When examining archetypes from a sociological perspective, we can discern a four-step process that archetypes can go through on their way to becoming established in the spiritual lexicon of a culture. **Step one** is the actual experience. **Step two** is the primary and secondary expression and then elaboration. **Step three** is the production of archetypes for wider distribution. **Step four** is the distribution of these archetypes to the intended consumer, i.e., the masses going to church or attending a Star Wars movie. In the case of the Zoroastrian archetypes, Zoroaster's individual experiences were elaborated both in community and later by elite Persian priests. These priests produced archetypes (i.e., they created the Zoroastrian sacred texts) and then distributed these archetypes in Persia. Later on, they were taken up by Western monotheism and eventually the modern Capitalist culture industry (Sosteric 2024).

Given that elites get involved in the elaboration and dissemination of archetypes, it is reasonable to suggest that archetypes themselves, and perhaps all aspects of human spirituality, operate in a contested space where actors exploit elements of religious discourse, like the bible, the tarot, etc., to provide meaning and moral (Nesbitt 2020) and political authority to support their vested interests. This contest can be framed as a contest between various actors seeking to further progressive or reactionary agendas. Margot Adler (1986) notes that Wiccan and Pagan spirituality emerge as a consequence of disaffection with what members of these communities view as the oppressive traditions of Western Monotheism (Catholicism, Judaism, etc.). Pagan spirituality like Wicca, which will also contain elaborated versions of collective archetypes, are attempts to recover an authenticity lost in elite-generated or elite-infiltrated spiritual traditions. Archetypes may occupy a similarly contested space with authors and artists contesting and trying to recover authenticity lost when elite actors take control of the archetypes.

If true, we might find evidence of this contest in the various stages of archetypal production identified earlier, in the artistic renderings of Tarot decks, or in the artistic output of writers, musicians, painters, mystics, and others working to recover the "purity" of primary archetypal expression. We might also look for evidence of this contest in the suppression of "marginal knowledges" (McHoul and Grace 1993:15) i.e. knowledge systems that stand contrary to the mainstream provided by Western monotheistic religions. Consider for example the brutal repression of Australian aboriginal archetypal systems derived from "dreaming" or visions quests

(Lawlor 1991; Some 1994) or the Catholic repression of African shamanic knowledge systems which undermine a capitalist world view (Some 1994).

Looking for evidence of a contested spirituality, telling the story of how archetypes are co-opted and marginal knowledges suppressed, is important. For sociologists, it is important because it elaborates a fascinating area of inquiry traditionally neglected by sociologists who study religion and human spirituality. For psychologists, it is important because elite archetypes are often naively accepted as deep spiritual/psychological wisdom and then used in therapeutic contexts where therapists inadvertently and inappropriately use them to shape clients into forms suitable for insertion into the capitalist system.

Telling this story is also important for human survival reasons as well. Scientists have noted the psychological, economic, and ecological disaster unfolding on this planet. Some have recognized that science has played a part in this disaster by disenchanting the world and stripping it of deeper meaning and ritual (Krippner 1988:131). To that, I would add that scientists have also helped destroy the human psyche and undermine human potential by erasing critical aspects of human experience, in particularly mystical experience. Since humans obviously have a need for the truth, understanding, and deeper meaning that comes from archetypal experiences, this failure has left an ethical and archetypal vacuum that has allowed elite systems of meaning to dominate the human psyche. This is a vacuum that interested scholars should move to fill.

Of course, in a discipline that prides itself on the arm's length distance it puts between itself and "savage superstition," as Berger (1970:24) once put it, this suggestion may strike some as anathema; however, concern for what we might call Archetypal Reform reform existed at the birth of sociology. August Comte, recognizing the limitations and abuses to which religion had been put through the years, tried to start a new "positive" religion (Comte 1852) with new concepts and ideas and new archetypal answers to big questions.

Similarly, but somewhat less ambitious, scholars in other disciplines have called for a reenchantment of science (Griffen 1988) with discourses (Laszlo, Grof, and Russell 1999) and creation stories (Swimme 1988) that provide the deeper meaning humans require, and that would presumably offer an alternative to elite narratives. Given the ecological and political horrors unfolding as a consequence of unfettered Capitalism, horrors at least in part aided and abetted by archetypal systems created in elite symbol factories like the Sassanian high priest's temple or Freemason's lodge, this project is important. New archetypes, or at least new interpretations, have to be developed that take human consciousness away from meaning systems reflective of elite economic and political interest and towards more egalitarian, humanistic, and ecologically consciousness alternatives. Such a project would be stymied by failure to take into account elite manipulation of symbol systems. Failure to recognize that elites elaborate archetypes to support their specific agenda would inevitably mean importing these elite ideas into our attempts to break free. For example, Laszlo (2006) attempts to re-enchant science but imports archetypal notions

of good and evil sourced, as we have seen, in the Persian Gathas created some 1,800 years ago by an elite actor bent on reshaping the world. Laszlo's language is secular, but the elite elaborated archetypes are recognizable just the same.

How do we start the re-enchantment of science? How do we imagine/create new archetypes that reflect goals and values other than those co-opted and created by elite actors? This will require at least three things.

Number one, it will require an in depth historical, psychological, and sociological analysis of existing archetypal systems with specific attention paid to how archetypes are co-opted and elaborated by elites for political and economic purposes. I have taken a few tentative steps here (Sosteric 2014, 2020; Mike Sosteric 2021a; Sosteric 2024), but more needs to be done.

Number two, it will require the careful elaboration of new archetypes conducive not to the Capitalist agenda, but to a humanistic or authentically spiritual one. From there, we will have to construct new narratives and new stories, ones that do not support a predatory and destructive capitalist system that privileges a fortunate/chosen few while disadvantaging the many and threatening the planet, but one that heals, uplifts, and transforms. I have constructed such an archetype system which I call the [Triumph of Spirit Archetype System](Mike Sosteric 2021b). I introduce this system later in this course

Number three, it will require a concerted effort to produce and distribute the new archetypes through all available communication channels. This production and distribution is critical, but has historically been something that only elites have had the resources to do. These days, however, the Internet has democratized things a bit and cultural production has been diffused into the hands of non-elite actors.

Conclusion

To summarize, archetypes, whether experienced in dreaming, during meditation, as part of vision quests, or in powerful mystical experiences, and whether elaborated in a primary or secondary fashion, shape our views of self and influence our actions in the world. Archetypes are powerful and important; indeed, archetypes shape reality; however, archetypes, sourced in human imagination have been co-opted and corrupted by elite actors who colonize these important experiences and shape them for their political or economic goals. The nature of these archetypes and the consequences of this colonization for human health and this planet's survival need to be carefully examined. In addition, these archetypes need to be replaced. As commentators have noted, science can and should play a role here. Unfortunately, science has disenchanted the world and left a vacuum that has allowed archetypes elaborated by elites total domination of the collective psyche. If science is to play a role, it must accept the significance of archetypes and self-consciously help develop alternatives rooted in the psychological, emotional, and sociological realities of human existence. The way forward here is the re-enchant of the world

with new archetypes grounded not in the elite interests of the few, but in the humanitarian interests of humanity as a whole. Whether we look to ancient Indigenous systems of knowledge as some suggest we should (Lawlor 1991), develop entirely novel archetypal systems as suggested in this paper, or proceed forward with some combination of the two, is a choice we can make as we move forward

References

Adler, Margot. 1986. *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Berger, Peter. 1970. *A Rumor of Angels*. New York: Anchor Books.

Biesele, Megan. 1986. "How Hunter-Gatherers' Stories 'Make Sense': Semantics and Adaptation." *Cultural Anthropology* 1(2):157–70. doi: 10.1525/can.1986.1.2.02a00030.

Boyce, Mary. 2001. *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge.

Brigit, Biddy. 2020. "Fool Tarot Card Meanings." *Biddy Tarot*. Retrieved May 10, 2020 (https://www.biddytarot.com/tarot-card-meanings/major-arcana/fool/).

Broker, Ignatia. 1983. *Night Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative*. Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Brown, D. E. 1991. *Human Universals*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Campbell, Joseph. 2004. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Comte, Auguste. 1852. *The Catechism of Positivism; or, Summary Exposition of the Universal Religion*. London: John Chapman.

Dossey, Larry. 2015. "Nonlocal Mind: A (Fairly) Brief History of the Term." *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* 11(2):89–101. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2014.12.001.

Ehrman, Bart D. 2007. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. Harper One.

Ellens, J. Harold. 2001. "Introduction: The Destructive Power of Religion." Pp. 1–9 in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, edited by J. H. Ellens. Westport, CT: Praegar.

Frederick Johnson. 1943. "Notes on Micmac Shamanism." *Primitive Man* 16(3/4):53. doi: 10.2307/3316279.

Geertz, Clifford. 2004. "Religion as a Cultural System." Pp. 1–44 in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by M. Banton. Oxon: Routledge.

Griffen, David Ray. 1988. "Introduction: The Reenchantment of Science." Pp. 1–46 in *The Reenchantment of Science*, edited by D. R. Griffen. New York: SUNY Press.

Halverson, Jeffry R., H. L. Goodall, and Steven R. Corman. 2011. *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harner, Michael. 2013. *Cave and Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.

Jantzen, Grace M. 1995. *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jayanti, Amber. 1988. *Living the Tarot: Applying an Ancient Oracle to the Challenges of Modern Life*. London: Wordsworth.

Julian of Norwich. 1901. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

Jung, Carl G. 1964. *Man and His Symbols*. New York: Anchor Press Double Day.

Jung, Carl G. 1980. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2nd ed. edited by G. Adler, S. H. Read, M. Fordham, and W. McGuire. New York: Princeton University Press.

Krippner, Stanley. 1988. "Parapsychology and Postmodern Science." Pp. 129–40 in *The Reenchantment of Science*, edited by D. R. Griffen. New York: SUNY Press.

Laszlo, Ervin. 2006. *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions.

Laszlo, Ervin, Stanislav Grof, and Peter Russell. 1999. *The Consciousness Revolution*. Las Vegas: Elf Rock Productions.

Lawlor, Robert. 1991. *Voices of the First Day: Awakening in the Aboriginal Dreamtime*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions.

Marx, Karl. 1978. *The German Ideology*. New York: Norton.

Maslow, A. H. 1943. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50(4):370–96. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.115.179622.

McHoul, Alec, and Wendy Grace. 1993. *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject*. New York: Routledge.

Messadie, Gerald. 1996. *A History of the Devil*. New York: Kodansha.

Metzner, Ralph. 1971. *Maps of Consciousness: I Ching, Tantra, Tarot, Alchemy, Astrology, Actualism*. New York: Collier Books.

Miller, William R. 2004. "The Phenomenon of Quantum Change." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 60(5):453–60. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20000.

Mudrooroo. 1995. *Us Mob:* Australia: Angus & Robertson.

Nesbitt, Paula D. 2020. "Engaging Religion in a Contested Age: Contestations, Postmodernity, and Social Change." *Sociology of Religion* 81(2):142–57.

Perry, Samuel L. 2020. "The Bible as a Product of Cultural Power: The Case of Gender Ideology in the English Standard Version." *Sociology of Religion* 81(1):68–92. doi: 10.1093/socrel/srz022.

Regardie, Israel. 2004. *The Middle Pillar: The Balance Between Mind and Magic*. St Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn.

Ruyle, Eugene E. 1975. "Mode of Production and Mode of Exploitation: The Mechanical and the Dialectical." *Dialectical Anthropology* 1(1):7–23. doi: 10.1007/bf00244565.

Semetsky, Inna. 2000. "When Cathy Was a Little Girl: The Healing Praxis of Tarot Images." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 15(1):59–72.

Smith, Daniel, Philip Schlaepfer, Katie Major, Mark Dyble, Abigail E. Page, James Thompson, Nikhil Chaudhary, Gul Deniz Salali, Ruth Mace, Leonora Astete, Marilyn Ngales, Lucio Vinicius, and Andrea Bamberg Migliano. 2017. "Cooperation and the Evolution of Hunter-Gatherer Storytelling." *Nature Communications* 8(1):1853. doi: 10.1038/s41467-017-02036-8.

Some, Malidoma Patrice. 1994. *Of Water and the Spirit*. New York: Penguin Arcana.

Sosteric, Mike. 2014. "A Sociology of Tarot." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 39(3). doi: 0.29173/cjs20000.

Sosteric, Mike. 2018. "Star Wars Is a Religion That Primes Us for War and Violence." *The Conversation*.

Sosteric, Mike. 2020. "Rethinking the Origins and Purpose of Religion: Jesus, Constantine, and the Containment of Global Revolution." *Athens Journal of Social Sciences* 9(1):69–88. doi: 10.30958/ajss.9-1-4.

Sosteric, Mike. 2021a. "Response to Saad: The Sociology of Spirituality." Academia | Letters.

Sosteric, Mike. 2021b. ""The Triumph of Spirit Archetype System.""

Sosteric, Mike. 2024. "From Zoroaster to Star Wars, Jesus to Marx: The Art, Science, and Technology of Mass Human Manipulation." *Athens Journal of Philosophy*. doi: 10.30958/ajphil.3-4-1.

Swimme, Brian. 1988. "The Cosmic Creation Story." Pp. 47–56 in *The Reenchantment of Science*, edited by D. R. Griffin. New York: State University of New York.

Vaillant, George E. 2002. "Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives." *American Journal of Psychiatry: Official Journal of the American Psychiatric Association* (9):1620. doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.159.9.1620.

Vaughn, David Becker, and Steven L. Neuberg. 2019. "Archetypes Reconsidered as Emergent Outcomes of Cognitive Complexity and Evolved Motivational Systems." *Psychological Inquiry* 30(2):59–75.

Wiessner, Polly W. 2014. "Embers of Society: Firelight Talk among the Ju/'hoansi Bushmen." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111(39):14027–35. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1404212111.